

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10  
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11  
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 486  
INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA  
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI  
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU  
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD  
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 5080

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT PGOV BG  
SUBJECT: WILL ELECTIONS BE DELAYED? EFFECTS OF AWAMI LEAGUE SPLIT

REF: DACCA 4973

1. THERE HAVE BEEN RUMORS THAT PRESIDENT ZIA IS CONSIDERING A DELAY IN THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION WHICH HAS BEEN ON THE BOOKS TO BE HELD "BY THE END OF DECEMBER". THE OSTENSIBLE REASON (AND ACTUALLY A PRACTICAL ONE) IS THAT DECEMBER IS A MONTH OF HARVESTING WHILE FEBRUARY IS A MONTH IN WHICH FARMERS ARE NOT QUITE SO BUSY AND IS THE MORE TRADITIONAL MONTH FOR SUB-CONTINENTAL ELECTIONS. ANOTHER REPORT IS THAT THE BDG IS NOT CERTAIN WHETHER IT SHOULD USE THE 1976 PARLIAMENTARY DELIMITATION (BASED ON THE 1974 CENSUS) OR SHOULD REDELIMIT, PERHAPS INCREASING THE NUMBER OF SEATS ABOVE THE 300 NOW SET.

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2. IN CONVERSATIONS AUGUST 16 AND 17, THREE BANGLADESHIS INVOLVED IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER WITH THE ELECTIONS HAVE DISCUSSED THESE ISSUES WITH POLCOUNSELOR. ELECTION COMMISSION SECRETARY QAZI JALALUDDIN AHMAD SAID ON AUGUST 16, THAT HE HAD BEEN ASKED ABOUT BOTH DELAY AND DELIMITATION. JALAL SAID HE HAD OPPOSED

BOTH AND HAD FORWARDED THIS WRITTEN RESPONSE TO THE PRESIDENT ABOUT TWO WEEKS AGO THROUGH VICE PRESIDENT ABDUS SATTAR. SATTAR ENDORSED JALAL'S REASONING. JALAL REMINDED THE PRESIDENT THAT HE WAS ON THE RECORD ON MANY OCCASIONS THAT THE POLL WOULD BE HELD BY THE END OF DECEMBER, MOST RECENTLY IN JALAL'S PRESENCE WHEN AN AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION VISITED LAST MONTH. JALAL THOUGHT IT WOULD BE BREACH OF FAITH BOTH DOMESTICALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY. JALAL SAID ON THE SUBJECT OF DELIMITATION THAT THIS EXERCISE WAS, BY LAW, TO FOLLOW THE DECENNIAL CENSUS AND THAT THE CURRENT DELIMITATION WAS BASED ON THE DELAYED 1974 CENSUS. THE QUESTION COULD BE REOPENED BY INCREASING THE NUMBER OF SEATS AND/OR BY ESTABLISHING SEPARATE ELECTORATES FOR NON-MUSLIMS. HE SAID THE TASK WOULD TAKE FOUR MONTHS OR MORE FROM THE PHYSICAL DELIMITATION THROUGH THE APPEAL PROCESS. HE OPPOSED IT AS IT WOULD DELAY THE ELECTIONS AND, IF SEPARATE ELECTORATES WERE SET UP, WOULD ENDANGER THE UNITY OF THE COUNTRY AND THE BASIC IDEALS WHICH REMAIN OF SECULARISM. (ONLY THE MUSLIM LEAGUE AND RIGHTIST ISLAMIC PARTIES FAVOR SEPARATE ELECTORATES WHICH WERE LAST USED IN EAST PAKISTAN IN 1954.)

3. DACCA MAYOR ABUL HASNAT, LATER ON AUGUST 16, WAS LESS UNEQUIVOCAL ON THE POSSIBLE DELAY BUT DID OPPOSE IT AS A BREACH OF FAITH AND ONE WHICH WOULD BE USED AGAINST

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ZIA INTERNALLY AND COULD LEAD TO SERIOUS EXTERNAL CRITICISM. NATIONAL SECURITY INTELLIGENCE DIRECTOR S.A. HAKIM ON AUGUST 17, RELATED THE PRESIDENT'S THINKING ON DELAY BUT SAID THAT HE HAD ADVISED AGAINST IT. HE SAID HASNAT BOTH SAID THAT THE PRESIDENT AT TIMES IS GIVEN TO MAKING STATEMENTS WITHOUT CONSIDERING THEM CAREFULLY AND HAD DONE SO ON THE DECEMBER DATE, BUT BOTH SAID IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO CHANGE THE DATE AND MAINTAIN PRESIDENTIAL CREDIBILITY.

4. HAKIM AND HASNAT WELCOMED THE AWAMI LEAGUE SPLIT. HASNAT SAID THAT, ASSUMING BOTH AWAMI LEAGUES RUN CANDIDATES FOR ALL SEATS, THE PRESIDENT'S FRONT WOULD HAVE 600 OPPONENTS RATHER THAN 300 AND WOULD STAND A BETTER CHANCE OF WINNING. HAKIM SAID THE SPLIT HAS CHANGED HIS CALCULATIONS THAT THE CONTEST WOULD BE CLOSE BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT'S FRONT AND THE OTHERS. HE SAW MUCH DIMINISHED CHANCES FOR THE AWAMI LEAGUERS OF EITHER ILK, BUT HE SAID (SURPRISINGLY) THAT HIS PREDICTIONS INCLUDED A STRONG SHOWING BY THE MUSLIM LEAGUE. HE DISMISSED THE IDEA THAT ELECTIONS IN THESE PARTS HAVE IN THE PAST BEEN ROUTES AS, HE SAID, THIS TIME THERE WAS NO STRONG NEGA-

TIVE ISSUE AS THERE HAD BEEN (ANTI-BAKSAL) IN THE  
PRESIDENTIAL POLL.

5. WE CANNOT PREDICT WHETHER THE PARLIAMENTARY ELEC-  
TIONS WILL BE DELAYED AND AGREE WITH THE THREE MEN THAT  
THE PRESIDENT HAS PROBABLY NOT YET MADE UP HIS MIND.  
ZIA IS CLEARLY, HOWEVER, AWARE OF THE RESERVATIONS EACH  
OF THEM AND OTHERS HAVE ABOUT THE PROSPECT OF A DELAY  
AND ITS INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL RESULTS. POLCOUNSELOR  
(FOR WHOM THE CONVERSATIONS WERE FAREWELLS) PERSONALLY  
WONDERS IF HAKIM'S PREDICTION ON THE OUTCOME IS RIGHT  
AND SUSPECTS THAT THE ROUT PATTERN MAY WELL BE EXHIBITED  
AGAIN WHEN THE POLL IS HELD.

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## Message Attributes

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**Review Markings:**  
Sheryl P. Walter  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
20 Mar 2014  
**Markings:** Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014